

# Out of Bounds

JASON SNYDER

## Elway's retirement will leave a void in sports world

Michael Jordan, Wayne Gretzky and now, John Elway. When the football great retires this Sunday, it will hopefully bring to an end three months of crushing blows in the sports world. There's no doubt that their respective sports won't ever be the same again.

Whatever genius said, "all bad things come in threes," was proven right by the happenings so far in 1999. You can bet Denver Broncos owner Pat Bowlen was shaking in his boots when he saw basketball and hockey's greats call it quits. And when Bowlen received a telephone message from Elway about two weeks ago, he knew his expectations for the 1999-2000 season would take a monumental turn.

Unfortunately for Elway, his decision wasn't dependent on his love for the game or his drive for a

Super Bowl three-peat. Rather, a 1998-99 season riddled with hamstring, back and rib injuries and the news that he would soon need an artificial knee, forced Elway to measure his physical ability against his love for the game. And any 38-year-old man, pounded for 16 years, knows there comes a time when your heart gives in to a body crying "mercy."

Just like Jordan and Gretzky, Elway lived the athlete's dream. No, Elway wasn't cut from his high school's varsity squad like Jordan, and he doesn't hold 61 NFL records like Gretzky does in the NHL. Elway's story that captivated the sports world began on January 25, 1987...Super Bowl XXI. It marked the first of three Super Bowl losses in four years. So when the Broncos entered Super Bowl XXXII in 1998, his chance of wearing that coveted championship ring brought with it a sense of urgency. If

the NFC's 13-year domination of the Super Bowl was going to end, the sport's world would love to see Elway lead the Broncos' charge. And even though Elway would have to wait till 1999 to win the Super Bowl MVP award, all eyes were on him when Pat Bowlen preached the words, "this one's for John."

Mastercard missed out on their chance for a memorable commercial: An official sideline Broncos' cap - \$20. An authentic Broncos' football helmet - \$100. An authentic Broncos' jersey with #7 on it - \$200. Elation on John Elway's face following a Super Bowl game - priceless.

Elway probably didn't dominate the quarterback position like Jordan dominated basketball and Gretzky dominated hockey, but there is one aspect of sports for which Elway could be considered their equal or better; the ability to perform miracles in the

clutch.

The city of Cleveland was unfortunate enough to witness Jordan in the clutch in 1989 as he hit "The Shot" to beat the Cavs in the first round of the playoffs.

But less than one year earlier, Elway took the word "clutch" to a higher level. Any Cleveland Browns faithful could tell you of their horrific memory of the 1988 AFC Championship Game. It was the defining moment of Elway's early career. Anytime "Elway" comes up in a conversation, Cleveland fans get flashbacks of Earnest Byner fumbling inches away from the touchdown that would have sent the Browns to their first-ever Super Bowl. Then #7's historic 98 1/2 yard march to the endzone sealed their fate. And as "the dawgs" covered their heads and sank in disappointment, Elway had a highlight reel that defined his last-minute greatness.

From now until Sunday, the news will cover the career of John Elway in more detail than is necessary. Guaranteed, "The Drive" will be analyzed, the Super Bowls will be glorified and his heart will be compared to past greats like Joe Montana and Joe Namath. And it will all be well deserved.

And still, there will be some uneducated, jealous fans saying Elway is waiting until Sunday so he can receive a historic farewell. But Elway realizes there are bigger issues to deal with right now in Colorado. Grieving the 13 lost lives of Columbine High School holds more importance than the retirement of one man.

It is that belief (life outmeasures fame, fortune and talent), that Elway should be admired for. And that belief will have Elway watching the Super Bowl this year, instead of risking a

life-long injury in it.

The future of sports is uncertain. Right now, names like Allen Iverson, Jaromir Jagr and Peyton Manning are trying to take over where Jordan, Gretzky and Elway left off. If that is any indication of where sports are now, there is trouble ahead. But as sports analysts attempt to make greatness out of players that aren't, fans will see and begin to understand what "greatness" truly stands for.

The NBA already misses Michael Jordan's miracles, the hockey fans of the 1980s and early 90s can't find true greatness anymore and when the Broncos need a 98 1/2 yard drive for the Super Bowl, they will sulk when there is no #7 leading the charge.

*Snyder is the sports editor for the Beacon. Out of Bounds appears weekly on this page.*

### Down to the Wire...

# Hockey is secondary to tragedy

By Dan Wood  
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

DENVER - No one involved with the Sharks or Colorado Avalanche really wanted to play hockey Wednesday night.

They didn't.

In conjunction with the NHL, the teams postponed the first two games of their opening-round Stanley Cup playoff series because of the tragic events a day earlier at Columbine High School in suburban Littleton, Colo. Using a cache of guns and pipe bombs, two male students allegedly murdered 13 people and injured more than 20 others before apparently killing themselves.

"Let's face it. Right now, hockey isn't a priority," said Avalanche winger Jeff Odgers, a former San Jose captain.

Instead of playing the first two games of their Western Conference quarterfinal series Wednesday and tonight in

Denver, the Avalanche and Sharks will face off Saturday night and Monday night at San Jose Arena.

The series will shift to McNichols Arena for Game 3 on Wednesday, with the fourth game to follow there April 30. A fifth game, if necessary, also would take place in Denver on May 1, with a potential sixth game May 3 in San Jose. Game 7, if necessary, is as yet unscheduled, with May 4 at McNichols the likely possibility.

"In due respect to the situation, this is our way to show the community our respect," Avalanche general manager Pierre Lacroix said. He made the official announcement after his club's morning skate, with the Sharks on the ice. "It's not going to be easy for anyone in this community or anyone on this hockey club, but we have to move on and this is how we're going to do it."

Lacroix lives in Littleton, about a half mile from Columbine. Several Colorado players reside in nearby towns, short distances from the high school. Odgers is one of at least four Avalanche players, as well as coach

Bob Hartley, whose sons participate in the Littleton Minor Hockey Association.

One of Colorado right wing Claude Lemieux's baby sitters attends Columbine.

"We all live close to there," Lemieux said. "I'm just about 20 minutes southeast of there. Joe Sakic lives probably five or 10 minutes from the school. Everyone is just terrified. I went to pick up my car, and the service manager at the store ran out. His daughter was in the school."

"Denver is a big city, but it's a small town. Everybody knows everybody. Everybody is connected. The more (news footage) they showed on TV, the more faces I recognized, whether it was from kids coming to hockey games or seeing them at the practice rink — just faces."

After speaking to Avalanche chairman Charlie Lyons, Lacroix knew there was no way the series could go on as scheduled.

"Charlie's reaction was that we're close to this community. We have to act like all these kids are our kids,"

Lacroix said.

Lacroix went out of his way to thank the Sharks for their cooperation.

"As a father of teen-agers, I've sat here for two days and watched this coverage," San Jose team president Greg Jamison said. "There's no doubt in my mind this is a good move. Our hearts and prayers go out to the people who have lost their children. We really believe this supersedes anything that is going on right now in the sporting world."

Even before learning of the postponement, Odgers discussed the difficulty of trying to concentrate on hockey.

"We have a lot of fathers in this room," Odgers said. "Our wives are all mothers. You send your kid off to school and it's supposed to be the best years of your life, especially high school. Nobody should ever have to go through what those kids went through."

Sharks winger Tony Granato, who has four children, arrived Wednesday morning at McNichols believing there would be no game but trying to prepare just in case.

"When I went to bed (Tuesday night), trying to focus on getting ready for a hockey game, it was pretty tough not to be thinking about the families and what happened," Granato said. "It just exemplifies that we play a game, and that's it. There are many, many things in life much more important than a game. It's the Stanley Cup playoffs and I know it's why we play, but for the respect of life, to think about a game (now) would be ludicrous."

Center Mike Ricci felt the impact of the tragedy perhaps as much as anyone in the San Jose locker room. Until being traded to the Sharks last season, Ricci played for Colorado. He lived in Aurora, about 10 minutes from Littleton.

"The game doesn't mean much today," Ricci said. "We have to pay our respect for the families and just hope for the best. Hopefully, the kids get the help they need and the families just try to get over this as much as they can. It's hard to believe that many kids had to die."

San Jose coach Darryl Sutter, too, had his mind elsewhere.

"It's hard to even talk about it," said Sutter, a father of three. "You can't even begin to feel what those parents are feeling. I guess it just puts everything in perspective. It tells you the importance of talking to (children) everyday about what's out there."

Sharks winger Ron Stern thought back to a personal tragedy of his own. While he was playing junior hockey in Quebec, Stern's father, David, died in a car bombing in Montreal in 1987.

"You pick up the pieces and go on, but there is obviously a mourning period," Stern said. "No one can tell you as an individual when to stop mourning or when to deal with it. I don't think you ever get over it. You just learn to accept it and try to understand something out of the whole situation. There's no sensible understanding, but you try to make sense of it to help console yourself."

"You say that life goes on, but for all those dead people, it doesn't go on."

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